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Asphalt vs. Concrete

AC&C Surveys Computer Trends

Suburban Sprawl: How Counties Cope

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AMERICAN CITY & COUNTY

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BPA

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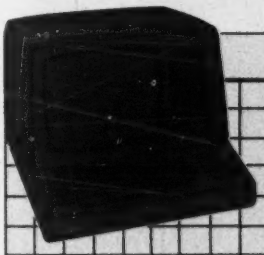

In which areas do you

- Personnel/Payroll
- Financial Planning
- Word Processing
- Tax Records
- Water/Wastewater
- Fleet Management
- Street Maintenance
- Scheduling

40

DEPARTMENTS

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About the Cover

When choosing between asphalt and concrete for pavement, many questions need to be answered concerning the durability of the materials, and rehabilitation and life-cycle costs. This month's cover story addresses those questions. (Photograph by Terri Teague of Atlanta.)

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AC&C Survey

Computers Move Beyond Payroll

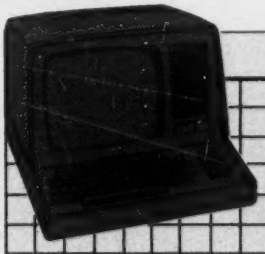
Local governments are relying increasingly on computers to handle projects from water and sewer bills to tax forms to map planning, an *American City and County* survey reveals.

By Joe Morris, Assistant Editor

Illustrations by Noreen Sherry

Clicks and whirrs from computer terminals can be heard all across America as local governments take advantage of the strides being made in high-tech industries. Now more than ever, cities and counties are automating their operations with the latest technology.

In an exclusive *American City and County* survey of city and county officials, 91 percent of all respondents indicated they had some form of computer equipment currently operating in their administration. This number represents a marked conversion from standard office equipment to computer technology for local governments, a conversion that has occurred rapidly, says Lynn Gardner, manager of local government marketing for Hewlett-Packard.



In which areas do you use computers?	
Personnel/Payroll	83%
Financial Planning	80%
Word Processing	70%
Tax Records	44%
Water/Wastewater	44%
Fleet Management	23%
Street Maintenance	16%
Scheduling	14%

"Local government computerization has been increasing over the past couple of years," says Gardner. "Most began with financial applications, and are now moving into other areas."

Other computer vendors also note the increase in municipal systems sales. "We're seeing a move to automation today that is much stronger than it was even in 1984," says Dave Crago, industry marketing manager for Prime Computer Inc.

"The surge in automation stemmed from the fact that computer technology became available to even the smallest cities and counties," says Doug Monroe, an IBM spokesman. "Automation was seen as a way to increase productivity in all aspects of governmental operations."

Since the early 1980s, advancements in the personal computer field have triggered attempts by municipalities to update their operations. Well aware of the trend, local officials say they are not surprised at the vast number of governments utilizing computer technology. Most note, however, the increase in usage has been a recent phenomenon.

"Five years ago, the usage would not have been as high," says Philip K. Schenck Jr., city manager of Avon, Connecticut. "But there is a lot more computer use now in the Northeast, particularly in the New England area. We have moved past the developmental stages with systems."

When a municipality does move into the computer age, it generally does so with smaller computers. This effort to stay away from the larger, mainframe systems gives many smaller computer suppliers a chance to move into the market, Gardner says. The trend also means governments are maintaining their own operations, rather than contracting out computer maintenance services.

Of those surveyed, 83 percent said their computer systems were entirely in-house, while 14 percent said they contracted out computer services.

The computer vendors in the market, largely dominated by IBM, from whom 44 percent of the respondents bought their equipment, also do well with training government staff using their high-tech machinery. Continuing training was provided for 66 percent of those responding to the survey, while 26 percent said their manufacturer did not provide continuing training after the initial familiarization program.

The municipal computer boom has taken place in stages, or at various levels, Gardner says. First, a government is likely to automate its financial departments, such as accounting and taxation. Computer applications for various departments, such as public works, police, and parks and recreation, usually follow.

This theory is borne out by survey results that show 83 percent of local governments use computers in personnel

and payroll departments, and 80 percent in financial planning. Word processing computer applications are utilized by 70 percent of the survey respondents, and other office applications are the next level of computerization, Gardner says.

"Areas such as public works are becoming more esoteric, beginning to use computers for such things as flow monitoring. All areas are doing much more planning with computers," Schenck says.

"After a government has automated its financial and other departmental needs, sometimes it will move into office automation applications," Gardner says.

One major area likely to become automated is planning and forecasting, Schenck says, due in part to the 1990 census.

"Because of the application and availability of data from smaller towns, the 1990 census will be used much more widely," he says. In 1980, most data came from larger towns that had major computer systems in operation. With the boom in smaller systems and personal computers, more data from a broader range of municipalities will be available, Schenck adds.

Initial costs may be high, but productivity improvements generally offset start-up costs.

Because local government personnel handle diverse activities, they search for equipment that will allow them to perform many functions, according to a recent report from Sperry Corp.

"The public sector manager needs to be able to move quickly from task to task in an integrated fashion," the report says, "pulling in data from the mainframe for analysis, whipping out a memo or report, presenting (the memo) at a meeting, while handling the constant interruption of phone calls."

Many forms of office automation technology exist, one of the most popular being electronic mail. This method of sending messages directly to one or several other persons is spreading like wildfire through the local government market, Gardner says.

"Electronic mail is the latest craze because of the high level of paper chasing in local government," she says. "Add to that the number of missed messages, and you see why a system where you don't have to wait to send messages is popular."

According to the Sperry report, nearly 66 percent of public officials surveyed used word processing, the oldest

Fort Wayne DPW Adopts Software-based System

By Alan K. Wong, David J. Vaclavik and David Hiatt

Like many other Midwestern cities, Fort Wayne, Indiana, entered the 1980s with a troubled economy, limited resources, and the need to maintain and improve an infrastructure past its prime. Much of the sewer system was constructed with brick in the 1800s, and although the water distribution system and street network were newer and in better condition, significant investment in maintenance and capital improvements was required.

The problem facing Fort Wayne is not unique. How can available resources be used effectively to provide public works services to current and future residents of the city?

Mayor Win Moses has sought to prioritize time- and cost-effective public works services. The key to the program is quick response to resident complaints and emergencies. Under Moses' direction, a Citizen's Advocate Office was established to manage complaints by routing them to the appropriate division within the Department of Public Works (DPW) for action.

This aggressive policy of attention to citizen concerns has corrected many public works problems effectively. Fort Wayne officials, however, realized costs could be cut and services improved by preventing problems — not just reacting to them. "We want to implement an infrastructure management system as a cost-efficient action," says Moses. "We can save considerable dollars by knowing where the problems are in our streets, sewers, and water mains as they happen."

Because of the varied recordkeeping systems used by different DPW divisions, information collected and reported is difficult to analyze. This, in turn, hinders effective and accurate public works capital planning. Recognizing the benefits of improved information management, Fort Wayne set several goals.

First, each division within the DPW would gain access to computers for engineering and office automation applications, such as word processing and electronic mail. The DPW had used the county computer system, which was already being utilized fully. Fort Wayne needed to acquire or gain access to a new system. Second, a method of computerizing all public works facility information kept on paper was required. Third, the DPW wanted its various divisions to be able to share facility information readily. Finally, DPW management wanted the ability to track job costs by type of work or area of the city.

To meet these goals, Fort Wayne installed the INFRAWORKS system, a software-based engineering tool that geographically inventories a city's public works facilities and their complete historical records. Systems were designed for various city divisions. New information forms were based on existing paper records and on an analysis of what information benefits the maintenance and engineering divisions.

The key to developing and implementing a computerized information management system is staff acceptance. In Fort Wayne, representatives of each DPW division are helping design their own system. As much as possible, the system is being designed around current operating policies and procedures, and using existing facility information gathered and analyzed by current public works employees.

Comprehensive, accessible information on facility cost and maintenance history will aid Fort Wayne's decisions on repair and replacement. This knowledge is perhaps the greatest benefit of the system, providing support for each DPW division to make budget and capital improvement decisions. □

Alan K. Wong is a vice president and David J. Vaclavik is a project manager with Camp Dresser & McKee, and David Hiatt is project manager of data processing for Fort Wayne, Ind.

office automation function. Almost 43 percent generated reports using specialized software to process data into information, while 21 percent used electronic filing/retrieval and scheduling capabilities. Only 13 percent used electronic mail and electronic calendars.

- Governments already utilizing electronic mail applications tend to be those that converted to computerization early. Cities that are more computer-oriented have a jump on their neighbors, both in technology and efficency. In Marietta, Georgia, administrative assistant Douglas Smith says the city is very well run due to its computer automation.

"Marietta is very computer-oriented. It has taken a lot of work off the typewriters," Smith says. "We use computers among many departments. I may be at a terminal now, and before me someone from the tax department may have sat here working on a tax parcel. Every department in the city is strong on computer usage."

Marietta does not have the electronic mail application yet, Smith says, but is studying the option and will likely implement the technology within 10 years. The city currently is examining computerized mapping. And that is another new trend causing a great deal of excitement in the local government market, Gardner says.

"Geobase, or a geographic database, allows all department heads to access data from a centralized database," she explains. "All people need access to a common database, but each will have unique applications. With a geographic database, you end up increasing productivity."

Large amounts of money spent by municipalities updating maps, as well as the lag situation involved in the map-

Fall River Computers Fuel Fiscal Health

The flight or decline of traditional industries such as fishing and textiles, the move of businesses and homeowners from the central city, and the decline in real estate values that erodes the tax base are common problems in many communities.

In the case of Fall River, Massachusetts, the additional challenge of Proposition 2½ exists, a law limiting property taxes to 2½ percent of assessed value. "It was clear the city needed to use every modern technique and technological weapon available to increase the level of services and decrease costs," says Mayor Carlton Vivieros.

The city investigated computer technology to save costs. In 1980, the mayor set up a task force to examine the benefits of automation. This group, made up of local business people and other professionals with a wide range of expertise, remains in operation today, seeking new ways to improve city services. Dan Rapoza, assistant to the city administrator, was named data processing coordinator, overseeing the implementation of the new system when selected.

After preliminary investigation, the task force concluded that a wide range of city departments would benefit significantly from automation. Clearly, the single overriding need was to obtain software designed specifically for municipalities, and containing a wide range of interactive modules to address all the financial and administrative areas.

Computer hardware was of secondary importance, as long as it met current needs and would permit future upgrades without changes to the software or retraining of users.

Several vendors presented proposals, with the contract awarded to Infocel, a Raleigh, North Carolina, company. "Their software met our criteria very well, but their on-site facilities management approach was the deciding factor," Rapoza says. "We felt no one in Fall River government had sufficient background to allow us to purchase a computer, get it on-line, and also maintain the necessary coordination within the government structure."

The facilities management approach meant the vendor would not only supply and install the chosen hardware and software at a data center in Fall River's main government building, but also would supply the personnel to staff the center.

Fall River took a phased approach to implementing the new system. The Water Department was among the first users because its staff already was familiar with computers. Additionally, Fall River recently had begun charging a sewer use fee, and the department was facing an enormous number of inquiries from residents who were confused and anxious about their bills. The new system permitted instant, on-line account summaries to be printed, which assisted residents in understanding their accounts.

The second major area brought into the new system was voter registration and census at the Board of Elections. Input operators were obtained under several federal training grants at no cost to the city. The operators gained the required on-the-job experience and city employees were able to continue with the business of government. Although this method required review and correction by the department head, massive amounts of data were entered expeditiously into the system, at the least cost to the city.

Computer assistance now has penetrated virtually every area of the city government. In addition to water and sewer, and the Board of Elections, other applications include accounting modules in both the auditor and school administration offices, license-tracking systems in the Milk Inspector and Health departments, and financial planning systems in the comptroller and school buildings and grounds offices.

The use of an on-line, multi-department computer system has benefited Fall River in numerous ways. For instance, the voter lists, once requiring as much as 12 weeks to compile, now can be generated overnight. Time-consuming searches through thousands of census cards and dozens of voter registration ledgers have been replaced by a simple inquiry process on a video terminal.

In the financial management area, collections have increased 5 percent under the new system. In addition, financial reports are completed as much as a month earlier than before, giving better fiscal control. Payments to local vendors also have been speeded, resulting in discount opportunities and lower bids.

The ability to stagger billing for water and sewer services has resulted in a more stable income stream. The new system also has enabled the department to pursue delinquencies more systematically, resulting in a decrease in bad receivables.

City officials also are sold on the advantages of getting the computer staff from the company that wrote the software, since they will be thoroughly familiar with the product. Another plus is having the data center in the same building, and not at a remote site reached through telecommunications. □

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ping process, have contributed to the success of geobase, Gardner says. "The cities often have a map that's not reflective of what's going on in the city. So, this idea (geobase) is receiving a great deal of interest."

The expense of such a system often deters use by small communities. But these areas often are able to form conglomerates to purchase and operate the mapping system. But the newer equipment on the market is not the only high-cost item for local governments that own computer systems. Basic start-up costs, as well as system maintenance, often can be expensive.

The Sperry report says one-third of the local governments contacted believe present systems are too expensive, so "vendors must continue the industry trend of increasing performance while lowering price before the public sector will be able to purchase what they need," the report says.

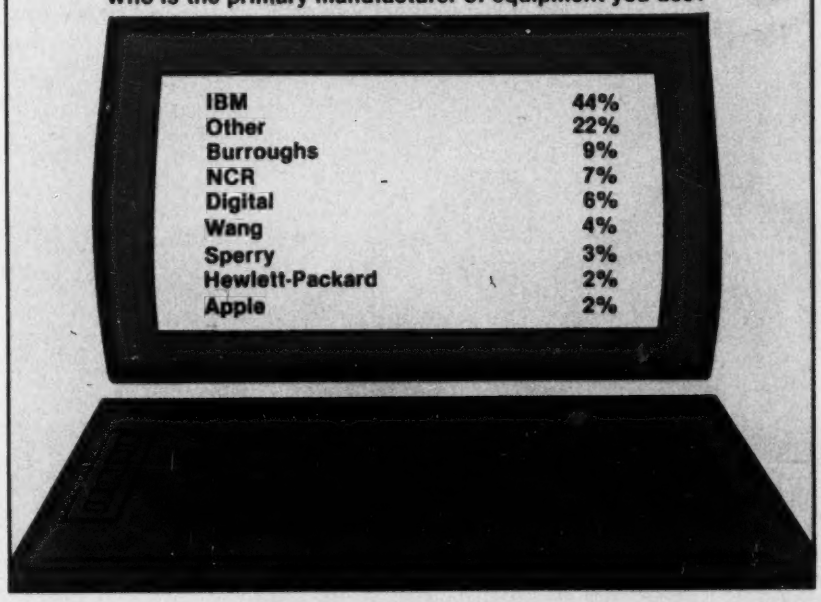
Marietta has spent $400,000 on its Sperry system, Smith says, but the city "pretty much has all the big stuff. In five years, though, it may be outdated, and we'll check into updating our equipment then. Our initial outlay is complete, though."

And with computerization growing, the amount being spent on systems is increasing. Seventy-eight percent of the *American City and County* survey respondents said they spent at least $50,000 on computers in fiscal 1986, and the same number said they would spend that much again in 1987.

In Avon, the city's computer operations will become entirely in-house this year. The city has budgeted $93,000 to complete equipment purchasing, Schenck says, which will include personal computers, terminals, and a central processing unit.

"We began automating with our tax billing in the mid-70s, and by 1982, we

Who is the primary manufacturer of equipment you use?



1986 budget for computer equipment purchases:

$50,000 or less	78%
$50,000 to $249,999	11%
$250,000 to $499,999	3%
$500,000 to $999,999	3%
Above $1,000,000	1%

1987 budget for computer equipment purchases:

$50,000 or less	78%
$50,000 to $249,999	8%
$250,000 to $499,999	3%
$500,000 to $999,999	2%
Above $1,000,000	.3%

Automation Eases Anxiety For Houston Employees

Automating a big city government is no easy task, but officials in Houston, America's fourth largest city, are successfully making the transition without creating a wall of anxiety around municipal employees.

"It was a major step," says Larry Yium, manager of finance and administration for Houston's Water District. "Most sections still use IBM typewriters, and we are trying to bring in automation that will not isolate them. They have had their typewriters for 15 years."

The problem, according to city officials, was the sheer volume of paperwork. Due to the city's explosive growth, the department had been grappling with thousands of records that had to be updated and maintained by hand, including processing more than 250,000 building permits per year. To deal with the overwhelming task of records management, the city utilities department decided to automate certain department functions, increasing the efficiency of existing support staff and reducing expenditures.

To remedy the logjam, two Wang minicomputers were purchased. Installed initially as a base system for data and word processing, the equipment is being expanded continuously to handle emerging needs.

Yium says it is too early to measure the cost reductions in the department's operation. The hiring of additional personnel has been prevented, however, by making the workload more tolerable for current staff members.

"We have been able to keep from hiring that second person we needed to get the job done," Yium says. "We also have been able to free people to do other things that need to be done, since we now can find the time."

The productivity boost was demonstrated when the water district wanted to revise its capital improvements projects, and perform a rate analysis for its 385,000 customers.

"Without computers, the work would have taken a week and a half," Yium says, "but with the system we have and a couple of people, we completed it in one afternoon."

When the system is fully installed, capabilities will be expanded to include the Compaq and Televideo personal computers and Toshiba printers the city has been using for file management and spreadsheet analysis. Yium says the expansion also will include installation of an optical reader to enable people still using typewriters to be fully integrated into the electronic network.

The now-completed installation was phased in slowly to ensure that unplanned glitches in the system could be solved before moving on to other areas.

"We have had complete installations before, and they turned out badly. We found out the system was not as user-oriented as we thought because it required programming that most untrained people find very difficult," Yium says.

The phase-in program, which required detailed planning by the vendor and the city, helped anxious employees absorb and master the complexities that accompany any major automation, he adds.

"The process generated interest, built up the confidence level of the people who would use it, and allowed us to work out the bugs," Yium says. "The installation also was 'user informed.' The people who would use the equipment were told where and when the system was going to be installed, and were thoroughly educated on its use as the process continued."

The gradual modernization also prevented costs from rising, since potentially defective or improper equipment could be replaced before being installed fully.

Timeliness is the main benefit of the new system, explains Yium. The word-processing equipment included with the system increased the dependability of recordkeeping, reduced record loss and increased system uptime. Other projects were accomplished quickly since department documents did not have to be typed more than once.

Houston is planning for the future. Computers soon may be making life easier for employees who work with city vehicle maintenance, personnel records, and road and bridge construction. The automated network will be involved heavily in project planning, and will help manage the city's capital improvement projects, which currently average $2.5 billion. □

were moving into our own system. This year, we will have everything in-house," he says.

One facet of the computer boom in local government is a willingness to share information, Gardner says. As cities automate, they often pass along the names of vendors or companies to their neighbors, she says. "They are very responsive to helping each other. When they are happy with a system, they let others know."

This internal referencing also offsets the cost of a new system, since a municipality that can see productivity improvements will not be as balky at paying the price. Although costs can be high for computerized systems, the results are usually worth the effort, according to the survey. Forty-five percent of the respondents said productivity improved from 5 to 20 percent following computerization, with 16 percent registering a more than 25 percent improvement.

"It's sort of a mushroom theory," Gardner says. "They start with one or two systems, then they throw a little water, or applications on them, and soon there are a whole lot more popping up."

The statements of increased productivity are hardly surprising, Smith says. "Before, councils would not be interested, but now they're buying computers. They have seen what computers can do for productivity," he says.

"There's no doubt about it, the computers will increase productivity," Schenck adds. "Not in terms of people, but the productivity improvement comes in terms of cost avoidance, accuracy and sophistication. By having better information available, there is better management."

Because of the size of the local government market, there are often gaps in computer sales. The market "goes in spurts," says Crago. "Unless they are in the top 25 or 50 cities and counties, expect data processing not to be on a high level."

"From our point of view, we don't see much difference in upgrading trends between commercial and municipal systems," adds IBM's Monroe.

With continuing expenditures in office automation, manufacturers also will be spending more time on products aimed at the local government market, such as electronic mail and geobase. Clearly, with such a potentially viable market existing, rapid strides in government technology should be forthcoming.

With governments moving into automation, and computer vendors making headway with sales and technology, the rush seems to be on for local government computerization. And with the right precautions, the rush may be a gold mine. □

MUNICIPAL COST INDEXES

The **Municipal Cost Index** posted a slight loss for July, as did the **Consumer Price Index** and the **Producer Price Index**. The **Construction Cost Index**, however, rose almost three points, climbing to 372.6.

In this month's marketbasket, the fuel oils family continued to slump, with both gasoline and diesel fuel almost 40 percent below last year's figures. □

—Joe Morris

These figures are calculated on a base year of 1967.

THIS MONTH'S MARKETBASKET

	Current Index	Percent Change From: Last Month	Last Year
Air Conditioners	148.7	.1	1.2
Apparel	184.6	.4	1.5
Asphalt Roofing	395.4	−1.2	−4.0
Books	138.4	.4	5.4
Chemicals, Industrial	324.6	−3.2	−3.4
Coal	540.2	.1	−1.4
Concrete Products	327.0	.5	3.3
Construction Machinery	366.1	.1	1.2
Diesel Fuel	394.5	.4	−38.2
Electric Components	200.5	.2	1.2
Electric Lamps	348.2	−.9	2.8
Electric Power	453.8	−1.0	−1.0
Engines, I.C.	353.0	1.0	3.4
Fans, Blowers	362.8	−.1	1.1
Fertilizers, Mixed	255.6	1.1	−1.8
Floor Coverings	194.4	.3	.8
Flow Instruments	234.4	−.2	1.0
Footwear	262.7	.5	3.0
Foundry Products	365.3	.1	.7
Fuel Oil No. 2	419.6	−5.3	−37.9
Furniture	315.8	.4	3.1
Gasoline	340.5	−8.3	−37.5
Generator Sets	349.7	.1	−.3
Glass	230.0	.2	3.4
Glass Containers	394.2	1.5	5.3
Gypsum Products	345.1	−1.7	3.5
Hardware	305.5	−2.0	−.1
Heating Equipment	267.3	1.0	3.6
HVAC Controls	127.1	1.5	4.2
LP Gas	374.2	−17.0	−29.4
Lubricants	377.5	−1.0	1.4
Lumber	307.5	.5	−1.5
Metal Fabrications	315.1	0.0	.2
Millwork	315.4	.5	1.9
Motor Vehicle Parts	358.4	−.1	1.1
Mowers	263.6	0.2	0.8
Natural Gas	1254.6	−5.6	−9.5
Office Machines	154.3	.3	−.3
Paint	280.8	.3	1.7
Paper	303.4	.6	0.0
Passenger Cars	232.8	1.6	2.9
Plumbing Fixtures	322.6	−.6	3.6
Plywood	244.7	5.3	9.8
Portland Cement	360.7	.4	.3
Residual Fuel	558.2	−16.1	−48.7
Sand, Gravel	316.7	.5	2.9
Sanitary Papers	381.1	−.1	1.7
Soaps, Detergents	273.5	−1.1	.2
Sporting Goods	204.6	.3	−.1
Steel Mill Products	346.2	−.1	−5.7
Struc. Clay Products	307.0	0.7	5.0
Switchgear	285.7	.7	1.8
Tires, Tubes	236.3	−.1	−1.0
Transformers	234.6	.1	.6
Trucks	340.4	.1	2.2
Valves	107.2	.9	2.8
Wire, Cable	207.2	.3	1.8
Wiring Devices	372.6	0.0	3.4

At-A-Glance Changes

MUNICIPAL COST INDEX

Last Year 335.2 — Last Month 336.3 — This Month 336.5

Percent Change From Last: Month .06 Year .4

CONSTRUCTION COST INDEX

Last Year 365.2 — Last Month 369.7 — This Month 372.6

Percent Change From Last: Month .8 Year 2.0

CONSUMER PRICE INDEX (BLS)

Last Year 320.1 — Last Month 326.0 — This Month 325.3

Percent Change From Last: Month −.2 Year 1.6

PRODUCER PRICE INDEX (BLS)

Last Year 309.3 — Last Month 300.3 — This Month 297.9

Percent Change From Last: Month −.8 Year −3.7

QUARTERLY MUNICIPAL TRENDS

	Current Level	Percent Change From: Last Qtr.	Last Year
Receipts	589.1B	1.3	6.3
Federal Grants	109.6B	7.5	14.5
Durable Purchases	20.8B	1.0	6.1
Consumables	38.3B	−4.0	1.9
Services	364.0B	1.9	7.8
Structures	55.6B	−1.0	16.1
Salaries, Wages	292.2B	1.8	7.5
Surplus	58.8B	3.3	−10.6
Employment	13.632M	−.01	2.6